

SENSATIONAL OPERA SINGERS AND REAL MUSICAL ART

Recent Popular Triumphs Point to a Return to Seventeenth Century Conditions in Italian Opera.

By W. J. HENDERSON.

ONE of his governesses told me that at the very sound of pinto and flacons he would fall into an ecstasy, as if he were tasting the joys of Paradise, and upon consideration of this his divine complexion, they would every morning, to cheer him, play with a knife upon the glasses or the bottles with their stoppers, and on the pinto pots with their lids; at the sound, whereof he became gay, would leap for joy and rock himself in the cradle, lolling with his head and monochording with his fingers.

Now, Pantagruel was a very superior personage, upon whom kings and socialists might have looked with equal envy, for he found elysium in a riot of sheer sound, which had neither form nor meaning. And yet when we contemplate the opera going public of this avaricious metropolis we find it a very Rabelaisian epicure or sonorous.

Within the last month it has gone quite delirious over delightful sounds emitted from the swanlike throat of a young woman called Amelita Galli-Curci. Again, one emerges from the foreign territory of Lexington avenue into the broad and crooked path of the white way and finds human beings herded together in the Metropolitan Opera House in multitudes and making glad demonstrations because Hippolyte Lazaro uttered sounds higher than those reached by any other known tenor.

He may proudly proclaim himself the Ellen Beach Yaw of tenors. It is a notable position to hold. When a man grows to be seven feet six inches high he trumpets forth the astonishing fact that he is a Russian or Irish or Greek giant, and forthwith admits people to a tent to stare at him at so much per stare. But no one celebrates this man a genius because he failed to cease growing at six feet one inch. Nor is he even declared to be a perfect specimen of manhood.

Yet when a tenor can sing one or two tones higher than any other tenor he is cheered by the populace and adored by the ladies. It is interesting and instructive. It makes one wonder whether after all an elephant is not a more beautiful beast than a tiger.

Again, what outbursts of rapturous approval there are when Maria Barrientos, with her countenance wreathed in a thousand strange curves, ripples along a shimmering scale, glances bright as meteor, and from the vocal cry and finally soars swiftly to a high E. It is not tragic, it is not comic, it is not pathetic, it is not lugubrious. It means no great thing, nor yet a little. It is like the poetry of Bunthorne. To understand it is necessary to think of nothing at all.

The New Musical Taste.

There, doubtless, lies the secret. It is just ornament and nothing else. It is sheer beauty of sound. Who cares for the text? Does any one take trouble for his soul for the libretto of "Puritani" is a farago of silliness? Who cares for librettos? Who mourns for that ancient, dead and happily buried creation the "music drama"?

With what immeasurable satisfaction we now quote Handel: "Music consists of successions and forms of sound, and these alone constitute the subject. They again remind us of architecture and dancing, which likewise aim at beauty in form and motion and are also devoid of a definite subject. Now, whatever be the effect of a piece of music on the individual mind, and however it be interpreted, it has no subject beyond the combinations of notes we hear, for music does not only speak by means of sounds, it speaks nothing but sound."

So who shall dare to twit the opera-goer who ignores the text of all operas and listens to voices playing tunes, as if those voices were fiddles or flutes which could not sing words? And it is to this complexion that the triumph of "coloratura singing," as it is popularly called, ultimately brings the proudly fashioned "lyric drama." We are headed once more toward the state of musical art which existed in Italy in the latter years of the seventeenth century, when all voices in opera were treated instrumentally and the lyric drama was nothing more or less than an extended vocal concerto. The opera-goer of that time, who refers with some self-comforting to occasions of rare musical exaltation in the feverish weeks when mobs battled around the temporary abiding place of Mr. Campanini's distinguished company of sound producers.

What the Public Wants.

There was one great and memorable piano recital. Josef Hofmann played in Carnegie Hall before an audience that crowded every available inch of space in the building and on the terrace. Just before the recital a piano—no scenery, no chorus, no orchestra, no other utterances of sound.

And there he sat, and Handel, to the contrary notwithstanding, interpreted such masterpieces as Beethoven's sonata in C minor and Chopin's E minor fantasia in such a way that no spirit could have remained untouched by the deep power and far reaching emotion of the message.

It is pleasing to hear a soprano sing sweetly and evenly. It is pleasing to hear her sing a sonata and an ascending scale. Few can do it. It is stimulating to hear clean cut staccato. But when all is said and done what great artistic thing is brought into the world? And yet the incontrovertible fact is that the vast majority of mankind, rather than hear the trills and the scales and the other ornaments of florid song than the greatest interpretation of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony or of Schumann's "Dichterliebe" conceivable by the mind of man.

The following letter is one of several of similar tenor. It is interesting for more reasons than one, but one of them is for the present, and it will be stated after the letter, which should have precedence.

Operator Protest.

"Sir: It cannot hurt you and it may relieve me to express my sense of helpless indignation at the species of rascals shouting we Monday night subscribers were treated to in 'I Puritani' for some years now (with the exception of the chorus and orchestra) the artists in the opera house have been counted on one hand; but that an institution whose walls have resounded the artistry of Jean de Reszke, Bonci, Caruso and McCormack should present to its patrons a leading tenor and a successor to the great ones of other years a singer so guileless of even the most rudimentary conception of vocal or any other kind of art is nothing short of an insult.

"Somehow it had never occurred to me that revision of present conditions could be still further downward. I thought it had already reached a limit in that direction.

"I am sorry for boring you, but after reading with incredulous astonishment

Sparkes and Messers. Diaz, Whitehill, Rossi and Reschiglian. Miss Galli and Mr. Bonfiglio will dance. Mr. Montoux will conduct.

CONCERTS, RECITALS, NOTES OF MUSIC.

At this afternoon's Philharmonic concert in Carnegie Hall Anna Case, soprano, will be the soloist. She will sing the cavatina from Weber's opera "Der Freischuetz" and the aria "Mon cœur ne peut changer" from Gounod's "Mireille". The orchestral numbers are Beethoven's "Symphony No. 3" and "Symphony No. 5". The Chopin suite of four pieces, "Chopiniana," orchestrated by A. Glazounov (final time at these concerts), and the "Capriccio Espagnole" of Rimsky-Korsakoff.

A Wagner programme will be presented at the society's concert of Thursday evening, February 28, and Friday afternoon, March 1. "Parsifal," "Tannhauser," "Faust," "Die Walküre," "The Flying Dutchman" and "Lohengrin" are among the music dramas from which the orchestra selections have been chosen.

At the Philharmonic concert in Carnegie Hall on Sunday, March 3, there will be a Beethoven programme with Harold Bauer as soloist, playing the "Emperor" piano concerto.

At the Symphony Society's concert

up of old and modern French songs, old English songs, old Italian songs and American songs, with one each by Horseman and Biss.

Heien Moller, American dancer, and an ensemble of fifty of her own pupils will appear in a series of dances of her own creation at the Metropolitan Opera House to-morrow afternoon. To the accompaniment of the Orchestral Society of New York, under the leadership of Max Jacobs, she and her pupils will give a programme of Greek dances and interpretations of musical masterpieces.

Included in the list are Schubert's "Major Symphony," Chopin's "Funeral March," a dramatic interpretation by Miss Moller; Saint-Saens' "Danse Macabre," an eccentric dance of death; further numbers include Israel Joseph's "Lullaby," written by this young American composer for Miss Moller; Jarnefelt's "Pavane" in which Miss Moller is assisted by her ensemble, and others.

Alphonso Griem, baritone, at his recital to-morrow evening at Aeolian Hall will sing old Italian airs, songs by Brahms, Hungarian folk songs and American songs.

Frieda Hempel will give her annual song recital on Tuesday afternoon, Feb.



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CONCERTS OF THE WEEK.

SUNDAY—Philharmonic Society, Carnegie Hall, 3 P. M. Symphony Society, Aeolian Hall, 3 P. M. Camille Seygard, song recital, Princess Theatre, 9 P. M. John McCormack, Hippodrome, 8:30 P. M. Opera concert, Metropolitan Opera House, 8:30 P. M.

MONDAY—Kathleen Bibb, soprano, Aeolian Hall, 3 P. M. Alphonso Griem, baritone, Aeolian Hall, 8:15 P. M.

TUESDAY—Frieda Hempel, soprano, Carnegie Hall, 3 P. M.

WEDNESDAY—Winifred Byrd, pianist, Aeolian Hall, 3 P. M.

THURSDAY—Maggie Teyte, soprano, Carnegie Hall, 3 P. M. Philharmonic Society, Carnegie Hall, 8:30 P. M. Herbert Witherspoon, bass; Florence Hinkle, soprano, joint recital, Aeolian Hall, 3 P. M. Alix Young Marchess, violinist; Myron Whitney, bass, joint recital, Punch and Judy Theatre, 3 P. M. Elias Breckin, violinist, Aeolian Hall, 8:15 P. M.

FRIDAY—Philharmonic Society, Carnegie Hall, 2:30 P. M. Victoria Boshko, pianist, Aeolian Hall, 8:15 P. M.

SATURDAY—Max Rosen, violinist, Carnegie Hall, 2:30 P. M. Russian Symphony Society, Carnegie Hall, 8:30 P. M. Pablo Casals, cellist, Aeolian Hall, 3 P. M. Olga Carrara, Percia and Rita d'Asco Roxas, joint song recital, Aeolian Hall, 8:30 P. M.

here now selected being the Debussy quartet in G minor, opus 15; the Mozart quartet in D, and the Dvorak quartet in F, opus 96.

Eddy Brown is announced for his farewell recital of the season in Carnegie Hall Sunday afternoon, March 17. The recital will be assisted by L. T. Greenberg at the piano.

Music written by French composers while serving with their nation's army on the European battle front will form a chief novelty of the Musical Art Society's concert on March 19 in Carnegie Hall, the second and last of the twenty-fifth anniversary season of New York's famous chorus. An interesting fact about these compositions is that most of them have no reference to the war, though they were written by and for men engaged in actual fighting, and were first performed by soldiers from the trenches in France. To Dr. Damrosch, who made the selections from a number of such works, it was suggested as if the composers desired to carry the thoughts and feelings of their soldier-laters and themselves as far away from the strife of battle and the thought of war as possible.

Among the new pieces are four by Carlo Salzedo, a New Yorker, performed here for the first time in Carnegie Hall, 1894, and which he has since written for chorus, set to words by Charles of Orleans—poet of the fifteenth century. Similarly three new choruses by Maurice Ravel have been chosen by Maurice Ravel back to olden times, to the France of peace and plenty. Florent Schmitt's "Chant de Guerre" is the only exception and is imbued with the spirit of patriotic fervor.

The Musical Art's programme will consist of a usual with unaccompanied songs and hymns of the church, some of which were on the earliest programmes of the society. Palestrina's "Stabat Mater" and a Bach motet were sung in March, 1894, and "Credo" in March, 1897. Beethoven's "Ave Maria," one of the most successful pieces in more recent years, was first given by Dr. Damrosch in December, 1912.

Part III of the programme contains some favorites by Brahms and Elgar, choruses by Rimsky-Korsakoff, which have the true spirit of Russia following, and an old Netherlands "Hymn of Thanks," which is known to every music lover and should form an inspiring close to the performance.

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